

### Related Occupations

Dietitians and nutritionists apply the principles of food and nutrition in a variety of situations. Jobs similar to management dietitians' include home economists and food service managers. Nurses and health educators often provide services related to those of community dietitians.

### Sources of Additional Information

For a list of academic programs, scholarships, and other information about dietetics, contact:

✶ The American Dietetic Association, 216 West Jackson Blvd., Suite 800, Chicago, IL 60606-6995. Internet: <http://www.eatright.org>

## Occupational Therapists

(O\*NET 32305)

### Significant Points

- Employment is projected to increase over the 1998-2008 period, but due to the effects of Federal limits on reimbursement for therapy services, the majority of expected employment growth is expected to occur during the second half of the projection period.
- Occupational therapists are increasingly taking on supervisory roles.
- More than one-fourth of occupational therapists work part time.

### Nature of the Work

Occupational therapists help people improve their ability to perform tasks in their daily living and working environments. They work with individuals who have conditions that are mentally, physically, developmentally, or emotionally disabling. They also help them to develop, recover, or maintain daily living and work skills. Occupational therapists not only help clients improve basic motor functions and reasoning abilities, but also compensate for permanent loss of function. Their goal is to help clients have independent, productive, and satisfying lives.

Occupational therapists assist clients in performing activities of all types, ranging from using a computer, to caring for daily needs such as dressing, cooking, and eating. Physical exercises may be used to increase strength and dexterity, while paper and pencil exercises may be chosen to improve visual acuity and the ability to discern patterns. A client with short-term memory loss, for instance, might be encouraged to make lists to aid recall. A person with coordination problems might be assigned exercises to improve hand-eye coordination. Occupational therapists also use computer programs to help clients improve decision making, abstract reasoning, problem solving, and perceptual skills, as well as memory, sequencing, and coordination—all of which are important for independent living.

For those with permanent functional disabilities, such as spinal cord injuries, cerebral palsy, or muscular dystrophy, therapists instruct in the use of adaptive equipment such as wheelchairs, splints, and aids for eating and dressing. They also design or make special equipment needed at home or at work. Therapists develop computer-aided adaptive equipment and teach clients with severe limitations how to use it. This equipment enables clients to communicate better and to control other aspects of their environment.

Some occupational therapists, called industrial therapists, treat individuals whose ability to function in a work environment has been impaired. They arrange employment, plan work activities, and evaluate the client's progress.

Occupational therapists may work exclusively with individuals in a particular age group, or with particular disabilities. In schools, for example, they evaluate children's abilities, recommend and provide therapy, modify classroom equipment, and in general, help children participate as fully as possible in school programs and activities. Occupational therapy is also beneficial to the elderly population. Therapists help senior citizens lead more productive, active and independent lives through a variety of methods, including the use of adaptive equipment.

Occupational therapists in mental health settings treat individuals who are mentally ill, mentally retarded, or emotionally disturbed. To treat these problems, therapists choose activities that help people learn to cope with daily life. Activities include time management skills, budgeting, shopping, homemaking, and use of public transportation. They may also work with individuals who are dealing with alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, eating disorders, or stress related disorders.

Recording a client's activities and progress is an important part of an occupational therapist's job. Accurate records are essential for evaluating clients, billing, and reporting to physicians and others.

### Working Conditions

Occupational therapists in hospitals and other health care and community settings usually work a 40-hour week. Those in schools may also participate in meetings and other activities, during and after the school day. More than one-fourth of occupational therapists work part-time.



*An occupational therapist uses special activities to help a patient build strength in the lower arm and hand.*

In large rehabilitation centers, therapists may work in spacious rooms equipped with machines, tools, and other devices generating noise. The job can be tiring, because therapists are on their feet much of the time. Those providing home health care may spend time driving from appointment to appointment. Therapists also face hazards such as back strain from lifting and moving clients and equipment.

Therapists are increasingly taking on supervisory roles. Due to rising health care costs, third party payers are beginning to encourage occupational therapy assistants and aides to take more hands-on responsibility. By having assistants and aides work more closely with clients under the guidance of a therapist, the cost of therapy should be more modest.

### Employment

Occupational therapists held about 73,000 jobs in 1998; about 1 in 4 worked part time. About 1 in 10 occupational therapists held more than one job in 1998. The largest number of jobs was in hospitals, including many in rehabilitation and psychiatric hospitals. Other major employers include offices and clinics of occupational therapists and other health practitioners, school systems, home health agencies, nursing homes, community mental health centers, adult daycare programs, job training services, and residential care facilities.

Some occupational therapists are self-employed in private practice. They see clients referred by physicians or other health professionals, or provide contract or consulting services to nursing homes, schools, adult daycare programs, and home health agencies.

### Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

A bachelor's degree in occupational therapy is the minimum requirement for entry into this field. All States, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia regulate occupational therapy. To obtain a license, applicants must graduate from an accredited educational program, and pass a national certification examination. Those who pass the test are awarded the title of registered occupational therapist.

In 1999, entry-level education was offered in 88 bachelor's degree programs; 11 post-bachelor's certificate programs for students with a degree other than occupational therapy; and 53 entry-level master's degree programs. Nineteen programs offered a combined bachelor's and master's degree and 2 offered an entry-level doctoral degree. Most schools have full-time programs, although a growing number also offer weekend or part-time programs.

Occupational therapy coursework includes physical, biological, and behavioral sciences, and the application of occupational therapy theory and skills. Completion of 6 months of supervised fieldwork is also required.

Persons considering this profession should take high school courses in biology, chemistry, physics, health, art, and the social sciences. College admissions offices also look favorably at paid or volunteer experience in the health care field.

Occupational therapists need patience and strong interpersonal skills to inspire trust and respect in their clients. Ingenuity and imagination in adapting activities to individual needs are assets. Those working in home health care must be able to successfully adapt to a variety of settings.

### Job Outlook

Employment of occupational therapists is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations through 2008. However, Federal legislation imposing limits on reimbursement for therapy services may continue to adversely affect the job market for occupational therapists in the near term. Because of the effects of these provisions, the majority of expected employment growth for occupational therapists is expected to occur in the second half of the projection period.

Over the long run, the demand for occupational therapists should continue to rise as a result of growth in the number of individuals with disabilities or limited function requiring therapy services. The baby-boom generation's movement into middle age, a period when the incidence of heart attack and stroke increases, will increase the demand for therapeutic services. The rapidly growing population 75 years of age and above (an age that suffers from a high incidence of disabling conditions), will also demand additional services. Medical advances now enable more patients with critical problems to survive. These patients may need extensive therapy.

Hospitals will continue to employ a large number of occupational therapists to provide therapy services to acutely ill inpatients. Hospitals will also need occupational therapists to staff their outpatient rehabilitation programs.

Employment growth in schools will result from expansion of the school-age population and extended services for disabled students. Therapists will be needed to help children with disabilities prepare to enter special education programs.

### Earnings

Median annual earnings of occupational therapists were \$48,230 in 1998. The middle 50 percent earned between \$39,140 and \$68,570 a year. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$30,850 and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$86,540 a year. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest number of occupational therapists in 1997 were as follows:

Nursing and personal care facilities .....	\$57,000
Offices of other health care practitioners .....	51,800
Hospitals .....	46,200
Elementary and secondary schools .....	38,200

### Related Occupations

Occupational therapists use specialized knowledge to help individuals perform daily living skills and achieve maximum independence. Other workers performing similar duties include orthotists, prosthetists, physical therapists, chiropractors, speech pathologists, audiologists, rehabilitation counselors, and recreational therapists.

### Sources of Additional Information

For more information on occupational therapy as a career and a list of education programs, send a self-addressed label and \$5.00 to:

✉ The American Occupational Therapy Association, 4720 Montgomery Ln., P.O. Box 31220, Bethesda, MD 20824-1220.

Internet: <http://www.aota.org>

## Pharmacists

(O\*NET 32517)

### Significant Points

- Pharmacists are becoming more involved in drug therapy decision-making and patient counseling.
- Earnings are very high, but some pharmacists work long hours, nights, weekends, and holidays.

### Nature of the Work

Pharmacists dispense drugs prescribed by physicians and other health practitioners and provide information to patients about medications and their use. They advise physicians and other health practitioners on the selection, dosages, interactions, and side effects of medications. Pharmacists must understand the use, composition, and clinical effects of drugs. Compounding—the actual